

Gifts of the Red Tent: Women creating

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COMPILER'S COMMENTS

My mom was the first person to register for the Gifts of the Red Tent conference. I gave her a hug at the beginning, but the need to attend to the details of the conference took over and I didn't see much of her the rest of the weekend. I do remember, however, one of my co-workers exclaiming on Saturday evening that my mother had not stopped smiling since the conference started. I followed Michelle's gaze to the front of the auditorium where a group of women were drumming. There, still smiling, sat my mother and my aunt drumming away. Mom looked like a child again, just glowing with excitement. At that moment, I suddenly realized why our planning committee had worked so hard. We were working toward a sense of welcome for all women to be theologians in their own creative ways.

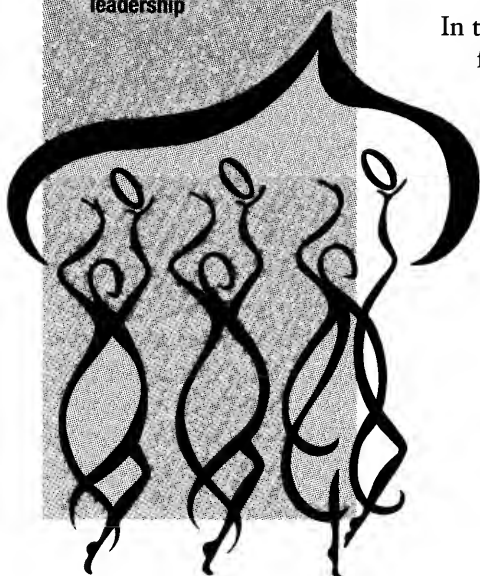
In the days immediately before the conference, I remember thinking that I would be incredibly glad when it was done. The details were overwhelming, and all I could focus on was the fact that 200 people would soon be arriving at Eastern Mennonite University and we were responsible to make sure everything ran smoothly. It wasn't until after the conference, as I was reading the evaluations, that I realized that this was an experience of a lifetime for many people, not just for my

mother. I never imagined that so many women would discover the creative spirit and the theologian within themselves.

I read now the reflections of the writers in this issue and, again, I don't regret the many hours of overtime spent in preparation for the conference. There are, of course, things that could be improved on, but there are also many things that bring pride to the planning committee.

The Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating, held May 16–18, 2003, was the sixth biennial "Women Doing Theology" conference. All of the writers in this issue were at the conference and put their reflections from the conference on paper for us. Their reflections come from their lives, where they are, what they have learned and what experiences they brought with them into the conference. Some, like Pauline Aguilar and Sharon Williams, knew of our intent to use their writings before the conference. Most of the writers in this issue were contacted after it had ended.

All of these reflections are connected with something that was meaningful to the writers at the conference. Rhoda Glick gives us an excellent overview of the weekend, while inserting some of her personal thoughts. Kristen Mathies allows us to use a poem she read during an open mic time. Michelle Armster's poem "Mother/ Sister/Daughter Hagar" was the artistic response to Iris' presenta-



I never imagined that so many women would discover the creative spirit and the theologian within themselves.

Tina Hartman works as the administrative assistant for MCC US Peace and Justice Ministries and was part of the planning committee for the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference. Other members of the planning committee included Moniqua Acosta, Michelle Armster, Debra Gingerich, Beth Graybill, Patricia Haverstick, Mary Lou Weaver Houser, and Jane Hooper Peifer. Tina is a member at Blossom Hills Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and lives in Akron, Pennsylvania.

tion. Lynn Graham connects peacemaking to *The Red Tent* in her article and Erica Littlewolf writes about a very personal experience as she shares her painful story under the comfort of the red tent.

Pauline Aguilar and Sharon Williams had a very different role at the conference than other participants. The planning committee asked them a few months ahead of time if they would be willing to do an anti-racism audit of the conference. They were asked to critique all aspects of the conference; from things like which women were asked to present to the style in which the worship services were carried out. It seemed appropriate to include some of their report in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. Their work has already become invaluable to our planning committee as we work on what will be passed

on to future planning committees for the "Women Doing Theology" conferences.

Throughout the conference, and in the months since, I have watched the excitement of the participants continue. There is a sense of encouragement and energy, and the conference is still brought up frequently in conversations around friendship and comfort. And yet, as much as I recognize the welcoming spirit of the women who were under the red tent that weekend, I see the pain of those who were not welcome or who were there and did not feel welcome. I regret that the unwelcome spirit still exists in our church structure and I know that until all women are welcomed among friends in the red tent, our work toward peace and justice will continue. It is my prayer that all women are able to welcome and be welcomed into the red tent.

—compiled by Tina Hartman

FROM THE editor

When I joined the planning committee for the "Women Doing Theology" conference, the theme and title for the conference had already been chosen. The conference was to be called the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating, and it

would draw from larger themes found in the novel *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant.

The buzz on Diamant's novel has been extensive and loud. As the *Los Angeles Times* said, "By giving a voice to Dinah, one of the silent female characters in Genesis, the novel has struck a chord with women who may have felt left out of biblical history. It celebrates mothers and daughters and the mysteries of the life cycle."¹ At the time of my joining the committee, I had not yet read the novel but had heard the buzz and several friends recommended it. So, as soon as I learned the theme of the conference was based loosely on it, I read the book. I was moved by the powerful women-centered tradition of the red tent all of the women of a family or clan, servants and enslaved women included, gathered under the red tent together once a month; this is where birth (sometimes even death) occurred, where women spent their time during menstruation, and where the passing down of family stories and traditions happened. I was also intrigued by the fictional telling from a woman's perspective of the Jacob and Joseph story. I cried many tears, and became angrier

The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

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and angrier as the book progressed. I could feel and identify with Dinah's bitterness as a young woman.

I walked away from the book wondering why we had chosen it as our theme. I understood the power and women-centeredness of the red tent, and continued to be encouraged by it, but in this particular story, the red tent (or the women it contained) failed Dinah. When she needed them to stand up to the men in their lives, they failed to step up to the plate. This of course needs to be viewed within the patriarchal construct of the times, but, within the novel and in the biblical text, it seems as if the women (at least Rachel and Leah) could wield great power. It seemed as if they did not use their power to protect and help Dinah. Eventually, as I got further away from my actual reading of the novel, I felt more at peace and embraced the red tent as our theme for the conference, especially since we were focusing on the themes of shelter, inter-generational storytelling, and creative skill-making found within the red tent rather than on the story of Dinah that the book included.

The planning committee did receive criticism for choosing this theme. Since *The Red Tent* takes artistic license with the biblical account of the Jacob and Joseph stories, a number of people considered the book blasphemous and inappropriate as a theme for a Christian women's conference. Mary Lou Weaver Houser, a member of the conference planning committee, replied to a letter that was printed in the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* in this way, "While recognizing Diamant's *Red Tent* as a work of fiction, we are drawn to the image it provides for women—God as our shelter and strength. We chose the symbol of the red tent as an imaginative metaphor . . ."²

The Red Tent is a work of fiction; I have never heard anyone claim otherwise. For me, it is a powerful exploration of what could have happened. One of my favorite books as a youth was *Many Waters* by Madeline L'Engle, the famous Christian novelist and writer (Diamant is Jewish). In that novel, L'Engle explores a fictional account of the Noah story. She tells the story of a daughter of Noah, how the

From the desk

- **Scarves for sale.** At the Gifts of the Red Tent conference, red handcrafted silk scarves were sold. The scarves were made by Madhya Kalikata Shilpangan (MKS), a women's co-operative from Calcutta, India. MKS partners with Ten Thousand Villages. The logo was created by Teresa Pankratz (from Chicago, Illinois, and is the illustrator of the *Women's Concerns Report*) and the scarf was designed by Mary Lou Weaver Houser (an artist from Lancaster, Pennsylvania). We still have a number of the square scarves (35" x 35") available. You can purchase the scarf for \$20 plus \$3 shipping. Please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org.
- **Taped conference proceedings.** We have tapes available of the conference proceedings. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulty, we only have tapes available of the Sunday morning presentation and most of the Saturday evening MCC Women's Concerns 30th anniversary celebration. If you would like tapes of either session, please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org. The Sunday morning session is \$8 (two tapes included), and the Saturday evening session is \$5.
- **Past issues of *Women's Concerns Report* available.** A nearly complete set of the *Women's Concerns Report* is available (from Report No. 16, September 1977). Elaine Sommers Rich would be willing to give the set to anyone who would be willing to pay mailing costs. Please contact her directly at 112 S. Spring St., Bluffton, OH, 45817; r-rich-4@alumni.uchicago.edu; or 419-358-1515.

daughter "walks with God" before the flood, and the many patriarchs that died or "walked with God" before the flood. This interesting and well-written fiction engaged me with the Noah story more than my Sunday School or church ever had.

The timeless stories of the Bible should and will continue to be the focus and inspiration of countless novels, films, conferences, documentaries, and poems. People will continue to be engaged by the Bible through the use of biblical stories in novels and popular culture; people who may otherwise not be interested in the Bible will be invited to explore the Bible through these re-tellings of the biblical stories.

Notes

1. "Praise for The Red Tent," found on the first page of the novel.
2. Mary Lou Weaver Houser, "Symbol of God's shelter," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 23 May 2003, 11.

Corrections

The editor would like to correct substantial errors that may appear in the *Women's Concerns Report*. We apologize for these errors. If you see errors, please

contact the editor at tjh@mccus.org or 717-859-1151.

- In the November–December 2003 issue, the author of the book review was inadvertently left out. Tina Hartman; who lives in Akron, Pennsylvania, works as the administrative assistant for MCC US Peace and Justice Ministries, and is a member of Blossom Hill Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; wrote the book review.
- In the September–October 2003 issue, Melissa Berkey-Gerard's last name was misspelled in the byline of her article, "God hears." It should be spelled Berkey-Gerard. In the same issue, it was stated that Jackie Wyse is serving in Almeria, the Netherlands. This is incorrect; she is serving in Almere, the Netherlands.
- In the July–August 2003 issue, the data used in Kimberly Schmidt's article, "You've come a long way baby," contained incorrect information. Alva Yoder, a deacon in Allegheny Conference, was identified as a woman, but, in fact, Alva is a man. Therefore, in 1970, Allegheny Conference had no women in leadership, and, in 1980, they only had one woman in leadership, Ruth Ann Yoder. ♦

Luke 10:38-42

by Kristen Mathies

Kristen Mathies writes, teaches English as a second language, and enjoys life in Waterloo, Ontario. She is a member of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship in New York City.



"Martha, Martha," he says.

Sure, he can say that.

He can say that *after* the bread is baked,
after the smell of roasting meat fills the house,
after the wine is brought to the table and poured.

Of course I love Jesus; he's been our friend since
before I can remember.

But if he cares so much,

about me getting the chance to sit and listen,
why didn't he get in here and help?

I know his mother taught him better.

More than any other boys in the neighbourhood,
she had her sons helping in the kitchen
stirring things, fetching what was needed, sweeping up...

What made him forget so fast,

about all there is to do, about all he could've helped me with?

"Martha, Martha," he says.

Fine. I'd love to join the conversation.

Next time he comes we'll eat leftovers. ♦

Women doing theology

A theology of wonder

Malinda E. Berry

What is the theological significance of these words [wonder, -ful, -s, wondrous, -ly, amaze, -ing, -ment, -d, sign, -s, etc.]? What can we learn from the Bible's use of marvel, miracle, amazement, signs, and wonder? From the perspective of the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament, "God's mighty acts do not automatically engender confidence and hope on the part of human beings. The people must meet with a readiness to accept and rely on them as manifestations of God's enduring benevolence and power to act."¹ Dennis Quinn offers an additional observation that keeps in mind the scope of the entire Bible. He writes,

It should be noted that the wonder-signs of God are real events that point to some future or otherwise hidden event or meaning . . . The miraculous character of the signs reveals the presence of God but not to those not inclined by faith to see God in the miracles as was the case with Pharaoh in Exodus [whose heart was hardened at the sight of these things]. More important is the meaning of the wonder-signs the mysteries they adumbrate.²

This is certainly the case in the New Testament where we read of the miracles Jesus performed.

After Jesus had left [the district of Tyre and Sidon], he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel (Matthew 15:29–31 NRSV) . . .

I have come to the conclusion that wonder is a multifaceted concept and thus seemingly complex. However, experientially we find that there is a refreshing and life-giving simplicity that is at the base of Christian faith, a re-visioned world in which all things are made new: to have a theology of wonder.

How does this fit with the biblical witness of wonder? 'Wonder excites, disturbs, agitates; it seizes the attention and stimulates the effort to find an answer.' The texts that use the language of wonder show us that God's activities create this kind of excitement, disturbance, and agitation. People wanted to know what on earth those signs and marvels meant. Imagine yourself as one of those lowly shepherds on that night that the sky was filled with a marvelous light created by a band of God's messengers. What would you have done if you were doing the family's laundry on the day the Nile turned as red as blood? And can you fathom watching your neighbor's brother walk out of his grave the way Martha and Mary's did? The world of the bible is one in which we are invited to look for the ways in which God's purposes are being worked out. The challenge of wonder is whether we are ready to look out at our own world with the same sense of anticipation that God is going to make something happen.

This article includes excerpts from the main presentations of the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference. The papers will be printed in their entirety in the *Conrad Grebel Review* in Spring 2005.

The texts that use the language of wonder show us that God's activities create this kind of excitement, disturbance, and agitation.

Notes

1. J. Conrad, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 8, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 542.

2. Dennis Quinn, *Iris Exiled: A Synoptic History of Wonder* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 2002), 121. "Adumbrate" is defined as "to outline in a shadowy way; sketch" by *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

3. Quinn, 3.

continued on page 8

A theology of welcome

The hospitable hidden women of Acts 2, 4, and 6

Reta Halteman Finger

I'm going to use some Pooh-logic here to get from my assigned theme to where I want to go. Pooh says, "If I know anything about anything, that hole means Rabbit, and Rabbit means company, and company means food and listening to me" . . . If I know anything about anything, a theology of welcome means hospitality, and hospitality means homes (or tents!) and food, and food means women preparing and serving it! Tie all that in with "theology," and it means that you have to go back to the Bible to figure out what it meant by hospitality, and then figure out from there what it can mean today.

There are two other reasons why I want to root whatever I say here in the Bible. First, the social practices of hospitality which are reflected there are much more similar to what takes place in developing countries than here in the West. The individualistic, technological culture of the West is far removed from our ancient texts. As we come to understand the social contexts from which our scriptures came, so we can better understand the social contexts of our sisters and brothers in the Two-Thirds world.

Second, I believe that a theology of radical welcome is not something added on to the gospel of Jesus, but is an integral part of it. For example, if you read any of the Gospels, but especially Luke, you will find that one of the major characteristics of Jesus' life was that he ate meals with a lot of different kinds of people. And often that was what made him either loved or hated.

There are many examples of women and hospitality in the Bible, but I will just briefly mention two in the New Testament and then focus on the women of Acts 2, 4, and 6.*

*The main focus of the larger paper is on Acts 2, 4, and 6. However, due to space, only this introductory text is included.

In Luke 10:38, Martha, apparently a disciple of Jesus and head of her household, welcomes Jesus into her home. It would not have been appropriate for an unattached woman to invite a man into her house, but Martha must have felt comfortable enough with Jesus to do so, and even to complain to him about her sister's inhospitable behavior. And Jesus obviously felt comfortable enough with her to tell her to chill out. Sometimes the most welcoming behavior is to forget making those extra chocolate chip cookies and just sit down and really listen to the visitor.

The second example is from Acts 16, where Lydia also appears to be the head of her household. This is one assertive woman! First, she gets her entire household (probably all her co-workers in dyeing and selling purple goods) to be baptized with her. Then, crossing gender, racial, and perhaps class boundaries; Lydia is portrayed in verse 10 as both persuasive and manipulative: "She urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us." Anyone who could prevail upon Paul to change his mind must have been forceful indeed!

A theology of wandering

Finding balance and harmony in our wandering

Iris de León Hartshorn

The most well known story of wandering in the Old Testament is that of the Israelites (Exodus 13). However, I want to reflect on Hagar's story (Genesis 16) and the times she was forced to wander; the first time as a woman with child, alone, and as a woman with a child the second time. She finds herself in a situation not of her own choosing, neither as a servant nor as a handmaiden to Abraham. The force behind her wandering was not one of natural disaster, but one of abuse of power over another human being. So, what happens when we are forced to wander? Does God meet us in the wandering or are we left alone, deserted by all, even God?

Sometimes the most welcoming behavior is to forget making those extra chocolate chip cookies and just sit down and really listen to the visitor.

The first time Hagar is forced to leave is due to Sara's jealousy of Hagar's pregnancy. Even though it was culturally appropriate for Sara to give Hagar to Abraham, did not Sara think what it must have been like for Hagar? Do we automatically accept what is acceptable socially or culturally? I have often wondered about Sara's own experience of God. What touched her spirit, her very being? Why do women make other less powerful women suffer? Sara used her power against Hagar. Abraham didn't ask Hagar to leave. In fact, Abraham told Sara to do whatever she wanted with Hagar. So if he didn't care what happened to Hagar and his unborn child, why did Sara use Hagar in such a manner? The arguments I have heard are that Sara was forced by societal pressures or the patriarchy of that day. Those excuses sound like similar things I often hear today between white women and women of color. Even if we view ourselves as victims, do we treat others with that same self-hate? Unfortunately, for women of color, we often turn our own self-hate on ourselves and our own communities . . .

The angel of the Lord intervened and found Hagar by a spring on her way to Shur. The angel told her she must return to her mistress and that she was to conceive a son. God sent her back. Some of us may gasp and ask why would God do this? Others of us know why. How many times have we had to return to unstable situations because we knew it meant survival for the time being. God knew if Hagar went forward, she would not make it to safety in her present condition, so God sent her back. I've been in the deserts of Ur in Iraq and know that even today it would be very difficult for a person alone, much less a woman, to make it across the desert safely. As women, we must be very careful not to judge other woman who may have to return to an unstable situation. Not all women have the same options open to them.

Hagar goes back, but I am sure not to a pleasant situation. I am sure that as women gathered in the red tent, servants were not treated as equals. In considering a place where women would bond, I have often wondered about the women servants. Were women servants allotted a small cor-



ner in the tent? Were they allowed to converse as equals with the women in power? If Sara would not show respect to Hagar in her pregnancy, what would make us think things would be different in the red tent, an enclosed environment?

Maybe Hagar found comfort in God's promise in the beginning until Sara conceived a son, which put Hagar's own son second, like herself. One day, as Sara saw Ishmael and Isaac playing together, she decided that Hagar and her son must leave. She wanted to make sure Ishmael would not inherit anything from her household. And so, for the second time, Hagar was sent out with her son. This time Sara told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael out. It's interesting how this text seems to try and redeem Abraham and actually gives Abraham permission from God to go ahead and send her out. I didn't read any text alluding that Sara had permission from God to send Hagar out the first time and God reassuring Sara that God would look out for Hagar. Here we may see how the writing and translation

The force behind Hagar's wandering was not one of natural disaster, but one of abuse of power over another human being.

of this text protects the man's character and Sara is seen as an "unreasonable jealous woman." But, it's also clear that Sara chose to stand with the powerful and use that power to put Hagar and her young son out into the desert.

God's angel once again intervened, hearing the cry of Ishmael. As the angel spoke to Hagar, she opened her eyes and saw a spring of water. The text goes on to say that God was with Ishmael as he grew up. Hagar went to Egypt, her homeland, to find him a wife (Genesis 21:20). What spiritual truths did Hagar gain from her experiences in the desert?

The Creator loves all creation and does not chose one person over another. God personally intervened not just once, but twice, and showed Hagar she was loved and was a person of value. Power abused is short-lived and continues to corrupt those who continue to use it. If you look at Abraham's life, you will see how he used Sara by giving her to another man for his own gain and safety. He sought security through his use and abuse of power. Hagar and Ishmael waited upon God and the text says that God was with Ishmael as he grew. Relationship with the Creator is about relying on God, and not based on force or abuse of power. ♦

Inspiration for the church

by Rhoda S. Glick

Rhoda Glick, a recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite Seminary, lives near Landisville, Pennsylvania, and works as a Gestalt Pastoral Care (GPC) minister in private practice and with groups. She also is a teacher of the GPC training program. She is an active member of Pilgrims Mennonite Church in Akron, Pennsylvania.

I came away from the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference feeling grateful, inspired, challenged and "wondering". The experience also affirmed and strengthened my sense of belonging to a larger faith community of which I am both proud and despairing; we have come a long way and yet we still have so far to go.

There were a number of aspects of the weekend that gave me hope/helped to enhance our time together.

- I was impressed and inspired by the stories shared by the women with extensive experience and history in the development of Women's Concerns in what is now the MCC Peace and Justice Ministries programs and in the broader Anabaptist circles. These matriarchs opened doors for all of us. As I listened to their stories, I felt profound admiration for and indebtedness to them.
- The three major conference presentations were scholarly as well as practical. They set the tone for our thinking. I was deeply fed by these theological reflections.
- The interest groups that met over lunch on Saturday represented many of the women in the church. I would have liked to see two more groups included: one for the specific interests and concerns of the aging and another for women who may have felt unwelcome because of their sexual orientation.
- I was grateful for the intergenerational and interracial aspect of the conference. The gifts shared by women from varied perspectives enriched the experience.
- The dialogical response to the presentations provided an opportunity for thoughtful, experiential and academic reflections that were inclusive and liberating. This format truly modelled the Anabaptist communal approach to Biblical interpretation.
- It was evident that careful attention had been paid to creating a space that was welcoming and nurturing. I worship best in an environment of beauty, color and order that has symbols of our faith so worship started for me as I entered the building (actually, it started as four of us participants car-pooled from Lancaster).
- The times of eating together, making new friends and reconnecting with old friends were opportunities for engaging in relational theology; a practice at the core of our Anabaptist faith and tradition.

- Drumming became a new experience for me! For the first time ever I entered into the joy and freedom expressed through drumming. In an impromptu session, Heidi Beth Wert made it so easy, enjoyable and natural!

There were a number of themes that kept appearing in the presentations, workshops and corporate worship. I will highlight below several that I identified.

- The stories of biblical women parallel the experiences of today's women. The woman of today can gain courage, a sense of direction and solidarity from these stories.
- Women suffer from the effects of oppressive, systemic patriarchy. Unfortunately, the church has often followed the lead of society rather than being a voice for change.
- It takes committed persistence to confront societal practices that are evil.
- We are not alone in our problems and challenges, and we do not need to be victims. The conference inspired me towards hope and empowerment rather than to view myself as a powerless victim. As women of faith, we have resources that can be used to transform our church.

The three theological presentations that guided our thinking were excellent. I will highlight several points that were meaningful to me from each of them.

Malinda Berry built her theology of wonder upon a brief survey of the Christian tradition. This review was helpful in making connections between the past and the task of our conference, women doing theology. For Malinda, a sense of wonder is "a new sense of awe, depth, mystery and possibility." This experience is basic to re-visioning a "world in which all things are made new: to have a theology of wonder."

Malinda reminded us that in order to tend God's wondrous works we have to name the "dragons" that would take life from us and silence our voices. As Christian women, we need to imagine a "world of peacefulness and freedom

that is full of God's justice" so that the Spirit of God can "make all things new."

Reta Halteman Finger used Pooh-logic as a springboard for her theology of welcome. The way Winnie the Pooh deduced that the entrance to Rabbit's home meant Rabbit, and Rabbit meant company, and company meant food and being listened to; this means people should connect the church with friendly people, and friendly people with company, and company with food and being listened to.

Reta built her theology of welcome on biblical examples of women and hospitality. Radical welcome is integral to the gospel of Jesus. From accounts in Acts 2, 4, and 6, we learn that hospitality practised in the home and in the church-community cannot be separated. It all is sacramental. Reta concluded that meals provide a great opportunity "to welcome people in, feed the hungry, and celebrate the risen Christ at the same time."

Iris de León-Hartshorn used the history of the 1800 years of wandering of her ancestors, the Mexica (a term that includes all of the people of Mexico, including the Aztecs), to introduce her theology of wandering. Just as her people responded to their God-given possibilities, so we, when forced to wander, can find ways that God is meeting us.

From the Genesis 16 account of Hagar's forced wandering, Iris drew lessons for women of today who are suffering because of abuse of power. Based on Mujerista theology, Iris proposed that

The dialogical response to the presentations provided an opportunity for thoughtful, experiential and academic reflections that were inclusive and liberating.



The woman of today can gain courage, a sense of direction and solidarity from these biblical stories.

we could use the symbol of the red tent to bring about inclusivity, balance and harmony.

I came away from this inspiring conference feeling both refreshed and troubled. I love such times of sharing in the context of theological exploration. However, my skeptic/activist self started asking questions such as:

- What really happened this weekend?
- What are we called to do to stop the cycle of violence that our society and the church tolerates?
- How can future conferences empower women of the church to create climates of change?

- How can we work together to break up patterns of coercive control that silence women's voices and rob them of the full expression of their God-given giftedness and calling?

On Feb. 18, 2003, *The Mennonite* published a column by Tammerie Spires entitled "Woman, you are set free" (this was a handout in the conference folder). In closing, I quote and offer this as a model for future conferences:

"What we thought were personal problems turn out to be the effects of systems geared against us. Get 50 women to realize we can work together to change the systems that confound and oppress us, and amazing things begin to happen."

A woman's way to peace

by Lynn Graham

Lynn Graham is a writer who has co-authored *Adult Bible Study guides* for Kindred Productions as well as developed worship material for use in church services. At the "Women Doing Theology" conference, she led a workshop on journal writing and the inspiration she received from *The Red Tent*. Lynn lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her husband and three young children. They participate in the life of Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church.

When faced with a stressful situation, a woman's impulse is to "tend or befriend."

The women in *The Red Tent*, by Anita Diamant, seemed to know intuitively that gathering together under the shelter of the red tent played an important role in keeping them healthy. The tent had many functions but one was to build a sense of belonging and intimacy; this is a piece of wisdom that got lost through the ages. Recently, two women doing research on stress management stumbled on the importance of this close connection between women.

These researchers, who were involved in investigating how people react to stress, came to the realization that 90% of stress research is done on men. The two female researchers then turned their attention to studying women.

They discovered that although it is thought that the standard response of humans is one of "fight or flight," women act upon different instincts. When faced with a stressful situation, a woman's impulse is to "tend or befriend." Drs. Laura Cousino Klein and Shelley Taylor have traced the biochemical reactions that produce the calming effect in women.¹ When the hormone oxytocin is released as part of the stress response in a woman, it

buffers the fight or flight instinct. Women combat stress by nurturing and reaching out to their circle of friends. This is the wisdom that the women of *The Red Tent* put into practice.

A stressful, threatening situation can explode into violence when those involved feel that their safety is in jeopardy. The players in the event may feel like the only way to protect themselves is to fight back or take the offensive. The research indicates that women's instincts in the face of a stressful situation are to nurture. Is it possible that this urge to take care of someone, if it were turned toward the one who was threatening, could work toward peace and remove the threat without anyone being hurt?

A biblical story came to my attention that seemed to clearly demonstrate the peace-making skills of a woman named Abigail. The account is found in 1 Samuel 25.² The story is set during the time that David and a band of men are hiding from King Saul and his army.

While David and his men are living in the wilderness, they meet some shepherds who are tending their flocks. These men are given protection by David's comrades,

so that while they are in the wilderness they are kept safe. David sends some of his young men to collect on this favor by going to Nabal, the owner of the flock, asking for food and supplies.

Nabal refuses them, sending them away empty handed, and David vows to seek revenge on him and his family for the poor treatment. "May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him" (1 Samuel 25:22).

Abigail, Nabal's wife, is told about her husband's stubbornness and the danger in which he has put their family. Without telling Nabal of her intentions, Abigail gathers up food and sets off to bring it to David and his band. She meets David along the route and tries to defuse the situation.

Abigail acts quickly on her intention to be a peacemaker. She decisively steps in to save the lives of her family although in her culture this would seem to be out of her control. With her family at risk, Abigail makes resolving the conflict her responsibility.

When others are arming themselves with weapons, Abigail uses generosity to defuse the tension and to make her enemies into friends. She gives gifts that are at her disposal. As a woman, food is probably the only commodity she has access to. She meets a basic human need; hunger. The desperate need for food felt by David and his men fuels their rage and pushes them to threaten violence.

It isn't clear from the biblical account that David's men are hired by Nabal, Abigail's husband. It may just be that David's men have made themselves useful in the way they are capable (that of providing security). Since they have been helpful, they hoped and expected to be paid. Abigail and her husband may have felt justified in ignoring them but whether she is in "the right" or not regarding payment, Abigail acts to stop bloodshed and bring about peace. She knows that people's goodwill and hard work need to be rewarded.



Thoughts of self-preservation could make Abigail stay home, but she instead goes personally in a sign of friendship, or at least of trust and well meaning. The result is this statement issued by David, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request" (1 Samuel 25:35). Abigail's mission is accomplished. Her plea for the lives of her family is heard.

David's intention is to murder Abigail's family but Abigail's actions change his threats to blessings for her. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand" (1 Samuel 25:32). Abigail accepted the challenge of a peacemaker, which is to elicit a blessing from an enemy, and she did it with hospitality. ♦

When others are arming themselves with weapons, Abigail uses generosity to defuse the tension and to make her enemies into friends.

Notes

1. Jean Houston, "For All My Women Friends," *Penn State's News Wire*, found at <http://www.psu.edu/ur/2000/womenstress.html>.

2. *Gideon's Bible*, 1 Samuel 24 and 25.

Mother/Sister/Daughter Hagar

by Michelle E. Armster

Michelle E. Armster is a creative soul, weaving song and drama through all dimensions of her life. She has brought this creativity to the variety of places in which she has found herself along her life journey—from lead vocalist of Class Action, an adult contemporary band, to an insurance examiner in Dallas, Texas, to her current position as director of Mennonite Conciliation Service in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A theatre graduate of Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas, Michelle entwines her flair for the dramatic with her passions for anti-racism work, peace and justice issues and her faith journey. Michelle attends Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This poem was her artistic response to Iris de León Hartshorn's presentation at the Gifts of the Red Tent conference.

Mother, sister, daughter Hagar
searching for a safe place
to be
to see her life not forced poverty
wandering
towards changed reality
Drink, sister from the Well of the Living One
Drink
cool spring of balm and rest
God/Sophia sees

Mother, sister, daughter Hagar
Her mistress lying
Her baby dying
God
Hear her crying
Drink, sister, from the Well of the Living One
Drink
cool
spring
of balm and rest
God/Sophia sees

Mother, sister, daughter Hagar
Marrow yearning for respite
Soul mourning for deliverance
Feet aching for wandering
Arm throbbing for nurturing
Drink, sister from the Well of the Living One
Drink
cool spring of balm and rest
God/Sophia sees

Mother, sister, daughter Hagar
Revealing Sophia's destiny
Seeing Lupe wandering over the desert of the Rio Grande
seeking justice for her children
Seeing Tasha wandering over the desert of the city streets
seeking shelter and a place to call home
Seeing Keiko wandering away from the desert of a home of violence
seeking safety and love
Seeing Amani wandering under the desert of AIDS
seeking comfort and quiet rest
Hagar—see your daughters!
wandering through you
wandering to your tent of liberation
Drink . . . ♦



My voice, my story

by Erica L. Littlewolf

Erica L. Littlewolf was raised on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Busby, Montana. She is in her fifth year in college at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota, double majoring in Psychology and American Indian Studies and plans to graduate in May 2004. Erica attends White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana.

I came to the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference a hypocritical teacher of storytelling—professing the importance of voicing one's spiritual life journey through the oral and written word yet believing that it did not pertain to me. Although I expressed this view, I managed to leave myself out of "everyone" and failed to see the value and worth in my own story. The conference gave me a voice, my voice, and left me with a story worth telling.

Here lie the words of my soul, naked and exposed for all to see. It's my story, a story still in the making. May you be blessed as you read from my heart and experience my trials; may you find a renewed hope in the Lord and the life He has for you. Here is my story:

It was dark. An all-encompassing darkness, like the bottom of the ocean floor, the sun banned from its black; or the innermost place within the earth, where life refuses to inhabit. I was amidst the darkness that demands stillness and solitude and leaves one sedentary and alone. There was nothing. I could see nothing. I could do nothing, for the veil enveloped and strangled me and debilitated me beyond movement and life. I was alone with myself, my worst enemy.

My life had left me. My boyfriend shed me as easily and painlessly as a snake sheds his skin, never looking back to see what oldness and familiarity was left behind. He left me to be ravaged by the world and by my own jealousy. I had nothing to call my own. I was him. He was what I put my time and thoughts into, what my future dreams and desires consisted of. We were inseparable, a perfect pair, and a relationship that outlasted them all. Amidst our dysfunction, we leaned on each other and found solace in time, for the relationship had taken a road of no return. It took a year and a half to reach a dead end. He dropped me off and left me in the middle of an unmanageable

and impossible wilderness, only to speed off in the opposite direction. He was my first love.

My uncle got the last word and left me to carry a heavy burden full and overflowing with resentment and anger. I try to recall the fun but I remember the alcohol. I remember his drunkenness and the helpless shell I retreated into whenever I was in his presence. I was constantly on alert, trying to impress his judgmental personality, while his rude remarks and hurtful assumptions lingered in my thoughts. I wanted approval; I wanted my uncle's love. His addiction killed him and my dreams of reconciliation were buried that cold December day. I watched as his casket was lowered into the ground and slowly covered, wishing the hole in my heart could as easily be hidden. He would have it no other way than to leave the hurt behind, for it was his selfish demeanor, and death did not soften this harsh reality. He was my uncle whom I loved; but the addiction and the drink I hated.

I cried out to God. I pleaded and bargained. I tirelessly asked for quick relief from this life. I hoped for the end, not by my hand, but an untimely accident. The hurt was heavy and weighed and pulled at my innermost being. It met me when I awoke and tucked me into bed at night. My darkness left no room for relief and found its way into my dreams and occupied all facets of my life. I quietly shed my tears within the security of my bed and found minimal comfort amid the darkness, for my emotions did not want to contend with the sunshine. I questioned Him to no avail and sought out His existence. The Lord saved me. He was my Saviour. I was seventeen. He offered me comfort and wisdom at no expense, for I had nothing to give. He let me be battered and bruised, only to rescue me and offer healing in His time. He cared for me, He forgave me, and He loved me despite of it all. He embraced my beautiful imperfections and filled my dreams with hope. His grace inspired me to live.

Here lie the words of my soul, naked and exposed for all to see. It's my story, a story still in the making.

continued on page 14

**My darkness left no room
for relief and found its
way into my dreams
and occupied all
facets of my life.**



I have been among the living and in the Lord for five years, not always fully alive but forever depending. Along my journey, I was burdened and blessed, as Paul, with a “thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7). My thorn is depression. It hasn’t been a constant battle, but a consistent one. It has been a lonely and life consuming journey, but with many refreshing and rejuvenating periods along the way. He is I, I am He; He is my strength, “and His grace is sufficient for me, for His power is made perfect in my weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). ♦

Anti-racism audit of Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating

**by Pauline D. Aguilar and
Sharon K. Williams**

Pauline D. Aguilar is the Quilting Co-ordinator for MCC West Coast. Sharon K. Williams is a church consultant with Mennonite Resource Network (MRN) Ministry Resources and a Damascus Road Core Trainer.

Context for a crisis

In February 2003, the planning committee for the conference (two women of color and six white women) identified a crisis in their work. A white woman had been asked to bring a formal response to a presentation by a woman of color. Due to the cultural context and personal content of the presentation, the committee was made aware that this arrangement was not appropriate.

The committee struggled with this issue. They realized other aspects of their planning had fallen into typical tokenism and racist multi-culturalism. A few women of color had been invited as leaders, but patterns of maintaining power and privilege for white people were still the default. An “equitable balance” was still giving “last word” power and critique to white people.

Struggling to understand the importance of the crisis, they asked: how could they make drastic changes midstream? How could they “un-invite” or reassign persons who were already preparing their assignments?

The committee turned to a dialogical approach for the response to the presentations, one that is more culturally appropriate in communities of color and that can model the inclusion of different voices. The committee also chose to acknowledge their dilemma to the presenters, respondents, artistic respondents and worship leaders. With some struggle, the committee organized caucuses as women of color and white women to work through the issues, personal concerns and changes.

They also decided to call for this anti-racism audit as a way to assess the journey towards anti-racism, to hold themselves accountable in their good intentions, and to share their learnings with their institution and constituents.

Strengths of the conference

These two actions greatly strengthened the event’s movement towards an anti-racist stance. The growing commitment to make changes in order to bring about a more anti-racist event was key. The public acknowledgment of the need for an anti-

racism audit demonstrated their commitment and courage. (See sidebar.) Knowing they could not stem the tide of systemic racism in one event, they still submitted their work to this scrutiny, acknowledging it as part of the journey towards seeking wholeness in the faith community. The committee is to be commended for taking the initial crisis seriously and making the necessary correctives, even though it required more work and energy. Their commitment was also evident in the post-conference caucusing and debriefing time spent with the auditors.

The creation of the dialogical table also impacted the movement towards creating an anti-racist event. The three original respondents formed the table, joined by another woman of color. Together, the responders interacted with all three presentations, using questions provided by each presenter. Conference attendees of all backgrounds expressed appreciation for this innovation. The diversity of the responders (ethnicity, roles as church leaders, academic training and life experiences) "gave voice" to the diversity of participants at the conference. Their interaction with the presentations and with each other created a wonderful "hermeneutical circle", a method of theological discernment practiced in many ancient and contemporary cultures, and prized by Anabaptists worldwide. The dialogical table opened understanding and application to the three presentations in its rich cross-fertilization of scriptural interpretation, cultural background and personal stories. After the second presentation, participants were eager to hear from the Table, even though the session ran longer than promised.

Other factors contributed to the dismantling of racism:

- Almost all planning committee members have taken MCC US Damascus Road Anti-Racism training; some are active on Damascus Road teams with their respective institutions. This greatly enhanced the committee's ability to work together through the crisis and to find anti-racist ways to organize their work.
- Artistic Responses and a dramatic story, shared by women of various backgrounds, helped everyone to relate to the presentations.
- Sunday morning worship received high compliments for its inclusiveness. Led primarily by women of color, it featured spirited singing and spontaneous, worshipful movement. Scripture was read in Spanish and English. People of color were visibly relaxed and fully participating. This worship opened "space" for everyone to worship as they felt led.
- White committee members spoke later of their conscious determination to let leaders of color have control of the tasks they had been asked to fulfill. This came into play with the presenters, responders, worship and music leaders and workshop leaders. It meant letting go

Imagine attending a conference for "women doing theology" and hearing this announcement in the opening plenary:

There are eight of us from the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, area who have planned this weekend . . . We learned some amazing things about ourselves, and the systems that we are apart of, in the planning process.

As we began brainstorming about the rich variety of God gifts that come to us in the rich variety of women in our church, we worked hard to include a "good mix" of women of color and white women for speakers . . . for workshop leaders . . . etc.

And yet we realized we were falling into the trap of multi-cultural tokenism as it applies to racism—racism that continues to be real in our world and in our churches.

So we stopped, took a good hard look at what was happening, and made some changes. We decided:

1. That instead of following the academic model of having a presenter and one respondent, we would create a dialogue between two women of color and two white women following each presentation . . .
2. That we would invite two women to do an anti-racism audit. . . They will review everything from the planning process to all of the happenings this weekend. They are looking at: who was asked to do what, how decisions were and are made throughout the weekend, how money was spent, etc. They are available for you to [share] your observations . . . Their written audit will [appear in] the *Women's Concerns Report* and on the MCC Web site.
3. That I would tell you all, on opening night, about our desire and attempt to make this an anti-racist conference.

. . . We are letting you in on some of the process of our planning, confessing with you the ongoing journey of imaging and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ where indeed all things are made new and the old stifling and restricting human systems are pronounced dead by the One who came among us, preaching freedom and release, new sight for the blind, and just plain good news.

May God grant us the grace to stay on this journey of imaging a world where peace and justice are known by all.

—Jane Hooper Piefer, excerpted opening remarks for the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference, May 16, 2003.

of the need to micro-manage details, such as requiring a printed order of worship for plenary sessions. Even when opportunities to close a session or have the final benediction were offered by leaders of color to white leaders, the white leaders supported the women of color to fulfill these responsibilities.

- Many participants expressed appreciation for the diversity of workshop leaders and reminders that everyone can “do theology” through the arts.
- Approximately 20% of the group were women and men of color, including international students who attend the university. The planning committee intentionally and creatively invited women of color to give leadership and provided financial scholarships as needed. This resulted in the highest percentage of people of color to ever attend a “Women Doing Theology” conference. Some women of color felt they were among friends, not just acquaintances.

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Expanding the tent

Even though 75 yards of bright “red tent” material suspended above us symbolized the welcome to everyone, this conference left room for expanding its full inclusion of all women. Several women identified times when it did not feel safe to think of themselves in terms of their ethnicities. These examples were noted:

- The use of language, unfounded assumptions, and white people’s propensity for perfection were problematic. References to “you people” and “dark spirits” were occasionally made throughout the conference. Ethnic stereotypes about dancing were assumed. When it became known that the knotting of comforters had to be done “right,” most women of color chose not to participate. And although comforters are needed and distributed all over the world, it was proudly announced that the six comforters were going to Russia.



- Music and worship styles were cited as barriers to full inclusion, especially on Friday and Saturday. Multi-cultural tokenism was present, and the music and the imagery were unfamiliar and uninviting to some. Much lip service was given to the need to free ourselves to dance as an act of worship, but it was not included in the services. By contrast, Sunday's worship became the "day of color".
- The location was identified as a barrier. An urban setting with a concentration of congregations of color would have encouraged more participation and easier access. (The planning committee had inquired about several urban locations, but Eastern Mennonite University was the only place available for this date.)
- The weekend was "too full" of things to do. One white committee member commented that white people measure success by how much they cram into a given time period. Women of color called for more time to relax together and build relationships.
- White women were clearly "in charge" of logistics and hosting by virtue of their staff assignments with MCC US.
- White theologians, professors and denominational leaders consciously or unconsciously chose to boycott this year's conference. Those present had either been asked to provide leadership or live in the area. One person, while appreciative of the emphasis on anti-racism and inclusion, did not perceive that the conference had much to offer professionals.

The process of dismantling racism

The planning committee's opening announcement definitely "gave notice" that anti-racism was highly valued. It redirected the usual complaints of white people when efforts to be inclusive become uncomfortable. Tolerance of racial and cultural differences was accepted by the participants publicly. But habits of white power and privilege still prevailed, as well as tokenism. Individuals were naming their power, but the systemic realities were, and are, very prevalent. While the planning committee grew in its resolve to exemplify anti-racist values, a disconnect between intentions and results still remained.

This single event does give hope that movement towards being anti-racist is possible! The auditors commend the planning committee's direction and actions, which strengthened the inclusion of people of color. In the context of MCC US's ongoing struggle to dismantle systemic racism in its midst, as well as prior "Women Doing Theology" conferences, this conference stood on the edge of representing real change. Future events will be assessed by forward or backward anti-racist change, based on what happened this year.

The welcome must not end: Recommendations for moving forward

One of the biggest fears noted by the women of color was that when white people and institutions make a little progress around issues of racism, they cease to recognize the need to continue in the struggle. Therefore, we strongly recommend the following actions:

First, it is imperative for MCC and all its entities, including Women's Concerns, to continue to strive to dismantle systemic racism within the institution. The gains made at this conference would not have been possible without it.

For future conferences and events:

- Make anti-racism a high priority—that all voices are heard and included. Claim and work at an anti-racist emphasis from the beginning of the planning. Start with the opening statement (see sidebar).
- Provide anti-racism analysis training for all planning committee members, presenters, workshop leaders, responders, and other key leaders.
- Empower more women of color to be involved as planners and leaders from the outset. This necessitates that white people understand and live into the anti-racism analysis, learning to work together in collaborative ways and to share the power with people of color.
- Provide opportunities to hear the voices of and build cross cultural connections with different people groups. White theologians, scholars, pastors and other church leaders should be encouraged to

One white committee member commented that white people measure success by how much they cram into a given time period. Women of color called for more time to relax together and build relationships.

Jesus exhorted the religious institutions of his time to move beyond words and challenged the comfortable structures and systems that continued to perpetuate oppression. This is also our struggle and challenge.

willingly learn with and lend support to people of color in the tasks of “doing theology” and ministry.

- Plan increased free time for relaxing and building relationships.
- Continue to provide scholarships for people of color in need of assistance.

Conclusion

The accomplishments of this “Women Doing Theology” conference are a positive beginning. Now we must find ways to continue the process. We must recognize that racism demeans everyone involved and we are in this together. Religious institutions too frequently hide behind

words and scripture passages that provide an escape from calling racism what it is, which is sin. Jesus exhorted the religious institutions of his time to move beyond words and challenged the comfortable structures and systems that continued to perpetuate oppression. This is also our struggle and challenge.

Let us continue forward. This work will pierce our hearts, challenge our theology and move us to experience redemption again. Several of the participants noted that having to work on anti-racism throughout the conference was a “new day” for Mennonite events. It is a new day we must continue making it anew for each other. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

The Wisdom of Daughters

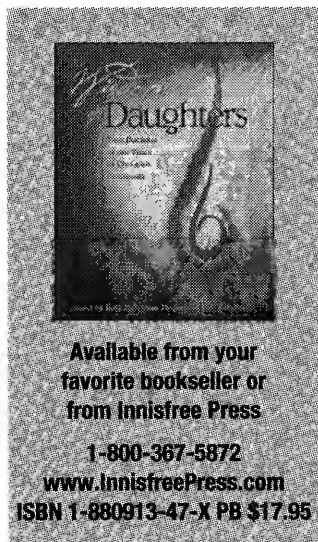
This review, written by Tina Hartman, first appeared in the July–August 2002 issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. One of the editors of this book, Reta Halteman Finger, was one of the main presenters at the Gifts of the Red Tent conference. We would have liked for this book to have been available at the conference but it was not; please see the column below for information on how to purchase this book.

The Wisdom of Daughters: Two Decades of the Voice of Christian Feminism. Reta Halteman Finger and Kari Sandhass, eds. (Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 2001). 263 pages.

The Wisdom of Daughters brings together a compilation of the women (and men) who named social justice struggles in *Daughters of Sarah*, a magazine in which Christian feminists expressed their views on the struggles and issues of the day, and gave creative ideas for ways to address these struggles. This book allows people who appreciated the magazine, which ended publication in 1995 after 21 years, to receive the best of it again, and it allows people who did not have the opportunity to subscribe to the magazine the chance to savor some of its amazing tastes.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, each with a different theme or issue. *The Wisdom of Daughters* includes articles concerning women in scripture, women (and men) in ministry, God as She, women, society, social justice and much more. The editors, Reta Halteman Finger and Kari Sandhass, compile a great variety of poems, articles and drawings from the best of *Daughters of Sarah*.

With the obvious division of topics and easy indexing of the information, *The Wisdom of Daughters* is a great resource for anyone who advocates for or is interested in women's concerns and the voice of Christian feminists. Its articles, poems and drawings were on the forefront of women's concerns in the time they were written and still continue to be relevant today. ♦



Youth and suicide brochure. Suicide is a word we don't like to think about nor talk about, and yet it happens even in our Mennonite and Brethren in Christ communities. The Mental Health and Disabilities Program of MCC Canada has just published a brochure, *Talk About It: Youth and Suicide*. Hopefully, it will be used by many youth and adults as a way of preparing themselves to walk with people who may be feeling suicidal or even for walking with families and friends who have lost a loved one to suicide. To order a copy, call MCC Canada at 204-261-6381, through the Web site at www.mcc.org/canada/health/ys_request.html, or e-mail ikj@mennonitecc.ca.

Writers wanted. The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC) publishes a feminist ecumenical journal called *Making Waves*. Beginning in March 2004, the theme of each issue will be creativity and spirituality. WICC is looking for women to write articles about the intersection of these two things, theological pieces, liturgy pieces, the impact of spirituality on the creation of art, and the work of creativity in healing work are all topics of interest for the editors. WICC is looking for women of different races, social classes, geographical locations, ages and backgrounds to contribute. For more information, contact Gillian Barfoot at barfoot@wicc.org.

Women's Sabbath retreats in Pennsylvania. Imagine sitting around the table with women from various centuries, women who inspire you, or from whom you wish to learn. Each retreat brings two women, a biblical character talking with a more recent historical woman, to enlarge our understandings of ourselves in God's amazing world. The retreats are held on Saturdays from 10 AM to 4 PM at Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pennsylvania. The January 10 retreat will focus on Queen Esther and Julian of Norwich, the February 28 retreat will feature Miriam and H. Francis Davidson, and Huldah and Teresa of Avila will be at the table for the May 1 retreat. Contact Sharon Kraybill at sjkraybill@paonline.com or 717-293-9641; or Mary Lou

Weaver Houser at mlweaverhouser@onemain.com or 717-872-2848 for more information.

Assets program in Miami. The Assets Miami program is an 11 week course that teaches students about entrepreneurship and business, including how to create a business plan. Many women, as well as men, find this to be a program that helps them to achieve the independence and self-reliance that they seek. Donna Jean Forster of Assets Miami says, "It's exciting for women to be branching out on their own and really realizing that they don't need to work for anybody else." Veronica Brown, an Assets graduate who now owns her own beauty salon says, "This feels good that at least I've taken the initiative to do something that I always wanted to do." Assets Miami is offered by Miami Urban Ministries. The Assets Miami and Assets Philadelphia are joint programs of MCC and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). The other Assets programs that are found throughout the United States (one program will be beginning in Canada soon) are sponsored by MEDA. Go to the MEDA Web site, www.meda.org, to find out more. *Beatriz Canals, "Woman to Woman: Assets Miami program," WSVN 7 NEWS, September 16, 2003, found at www.wsvn.com/features/articles_p/womantowoman/C11/.*



Women in church leadership

Kelly Downey is youth pastor at Zion Mennonite Church in Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

Larissa Kropf is youth/assistant pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler, Manitoba.

Cathrin van Sintern began as associate pastor at North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ontario, in October 2003.

Nancy Brubaker Bauman began as the interim pastor at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, Ontario, in September 2003.

Renee Sauder is intentional interim pastor at Wilmot Mennonite Church, New Hamburg, Ontario.

Jean Lehn Epp and **Lori Reesor** are co-pastors at Mississauga Mennonite Fellowship, Mississauga, Ontario.



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WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

MARCH-APRIL 2004
Women and immigration

◆
MAY-JUNE 2004
Men's changing roles

◆
JULY-AUGUST 2004
Christian women
in education

Web portal on women, peace and security.

On October 31, 2003, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched a Web site that is a centralized repository of information on the impact of armed conflict on women, and women's role in peace-building. Please access this site by visiting www.WomenWarPeace.org.

Honor killings in Pakistan. Madadgar, a human rights group run by the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid and UNICEF, reported that at least 631 women and girls in Pakistan have been killed by male relatives in 2003. "The actual number of women who fell victim to gruesome honor killings is definitely much higher than the reported cases but it is hard to record each case, especially when you don't have enough resources," said Zia Awan of the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid. The report said that husbands were responsible for 247 of the killings, brothers 112, fathers 54, sons 25 and uncles two. Honor killing, which is prohibited by Pakistani law, is punishment for extramarital sexual relations or refusal to abide by parents' choice of husbands. The male relatives are rarely prosecuted in

traditional communities. "*Honor Killings' in Pakistan reach 631 this year, group says,*" UN Wire, September 15, 2003, found at www.unwire.org/UNWire/20030915/449_8405.asp.

International Women's Day. On March 8, 2004, women and men across the globe will be celebrating International Women's Day. The idea of an International Women's Day began in the early 1900s. This commemoration is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on equal footing with men. Some countries even designate this day as a national holiday. One way to celebrate this day in the United States is to join with a group called CODEPINK. This group attempts to celebrate the power of women as peacemakers. Last year, they held workshops, protests, and concerts in the week preceeding March 8, and initiated a march of 10,000 to circle the White House on March 8. For more information on how you can celebrate women as peacemakers with CODEPINK, visit www.codepinkalert.org. To find out more about celebrations in Canada, go to the Status of Women Canada Web site at www.swc-cfc.gc.ca and click on "Commemorative Dates." ◆